



**OFFICE OF THE LT. GOVERNOR
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**Lt. Governor Becky Skillman Requests USDA Designate
All Counties Natural Disaster Areas**

Lt. Governor Becky Skillman announced today that she is requesting that the U.S. Department of Agriculture declare all counties in Indiana as natural disaster areas. The designations would make farmers in all of Indiana's 92 counties eligible to apply for assistance due to losses caused by extreme drought.

Also today, 14 additional counties in Indiana have been declared primary natural disaster areas by the USDA, allowing for farmers in 80 counties to apply for low-interest emergency loans through the department's Farm Service Agency.

"So many including those outside of Indiana depend on the state's agriculture industry to provide food, fiber and fuel," Lt. Governor Becky Skillman. "As the drought lingers on, the request to give all farmers the opportunity to apply for assistance becomes even more urgent."

Lt. Governor Skillman, Indiana's secretary of agriculture, and Executive Director Julia Wickard of Indiana's FSA will be sending a letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack requesting that all 92 counties be named as primary disaster counties.

On Monday, Lt. Governor Skillman met with leaders from Indiana's agriculture industry to discuss ways the state could support farmers. She also wanted farmers to be aware of what resources are available to them to deal with the drought conditions. USDA has declared 64 counties in Indiana as primary natural areas. Farmers in 16 additional contiguous counties also qualify for assistance.

Recent changes made by the USDA have streamlined the disaster declaration process. Counties that have been at a certain level of drought for eight consecutive weeks, automatically qualify for disaster designation. Counties that border primary natural disaster counties also qualify for assistance.

Farmers in eligible counties have eight months from the date of the declaration to apply for low-interest loans. FSA will consider each loan application. Additional resources to help farmers deal with drought may be found at a state website, www.in.gov/drought.

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Lt. Governor Becky Skillman oversees the Office of Community and Rural Affairs, the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, the Office of Energy Development, the Office of Tourism Development, and the State Department of Agriculture.

To receive email updates from Lt. Governor Skillman, sign up at www.in.gov/lg/2941.htm.